

RHONDDA CYNON TAFF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-2015

**COUNCIL
22ND APRIL, 2015**

Agenda Item No.8
INTERIM REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP DEALING WITH `FUEL POVERTY`

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with the Interim Report of the Scrutiny Working Group set up to deal with `fuel poverty` following the Notice of Motion considered by Council at its meeting held on the 4th March, 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the contents of the interim report of the Scrutiny Working Group;
- 2.2 To receive a further report outlining the further findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group at a future meeting of the Council.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will recall the under-mentioned Notice of Motion which was considered by Council at its meeting held on the 4th March, 2015 standing in the names of County Borough Councillors E.Webster, P.Jarman, C.Davies, S.Evans-Fear, S.Rees-Owen, M.Weaver, K.Morgan, I.Pearce and G.Davies:-

“This Council understands the effect fuel poverty has on our most vulnerable residents and believes that the current energy market provided by “Big 6” energy providers does not work in the best interests of the citizens of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

This Council believes there are better ways of providing energy to our residents and as a consequence will research options to enable the Council to seek to consider becoming an energy supplier.”

- 3.2 It was resolved at the Council Meeting “that the matter be referred for consideration to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee and a report therefrom be reported back to a future meeting of the Council”.
- 3.3 At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 18th March, 2015, following consideration of the urgent report of the Director, Legal and Democratic Services, it was agreed that a Scrutiny Working Group be established to deal with the contents of the Notice of Motion.
- 3.4 The first meeting of the Scrutiny Working Group was held on Thursday, 9th April, 2015 and was attended by County Borough Councillors R.K.Turner (Chair), R.W.Smith (Vice-Chair), (Mrs.)M.E.Davies, P.Griffiths and C.J.Willis and Members received a presentation from Mrs.Lyn Williams, Housing Energy Efficiency Officer (HEO).
- 3.5 With the aid of PowerPoint Slides, the HEO provided Members with information under the following headings:
- Definition of Fuel Poverty
 - UK Government and Welsh Government’s legal duty under the UK’s 2000 Warm Homes & Energy Conservation Act to do everything reasonably practicable to eliminate fuel poverty.
 - Statistics on Fuel Poverty and Fuel Debt
 - Contributors of Energy Inefficiency in Properties
 - The effects of Living with Fuel Poverty
 - Health Issues associated with cold, damp homes
 - Cyd Cymru – Collective Energy Buying an ongoing scheme, first piloted in 2013 as a result of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan being successful in achieving Regional Collaboration Funding – “Cyd Cymru/Wales Together” from Welsh Government, which can be accessed across Wales. The model endeavours to get the best deal for prospective participants in Wales through collective switching to get people on the best tariff. However, there is a short `window` of opportunity to register for the scheme which has a limited time period of approximately six weeks in a year.
 - Barriers – Energy Efficiency Technology, Tariffs, Loyalty, Engagement and Trust
- 3.6 In addition to the presentation, Members were provided with case studies of vulnerable people, who benefitted from the Council’s Heat and Save scheme whereby, on request, the HEO makes visits to people’s homes and offers free, impartial advice on energy efficiency and seeks the best bespoke tariff for the individuals concerned.

- 3.7 Whilst the Council's Heat and Save scheme is published on the Council's website which also includes a designated electronic mailbox to receive queries, referrals etc. (email: heatandsave@rctcbc.gov.uk Tel.No. 01443-425725), Members of the Working Group were of the view that the scheme should be promoted more actively e.g. through One4All Centres Community First Clusters and Town/Community Councils. In many ways the service complements the work of Nest, which is a Welsh Government scheme working to help reduce the number of households in fuel poverty. However, unlike the Council's HEO, Nest will only make arrangements for whole house assessment via British Gas if ascertained during the telephone assessment that the property is F or G rated and the individual is in receipt of appropriate means tested benefits.
- 3.8 Both the Council's scheme and Cyd Cymru ensure that individuals are advised of the best possible tariff that meets their individual needs and is not necessarily one that is offered by the "Big 6" energy providers. However, not all energy providers offer the Warm Home Discount scheme or the Priority Services Register. The Warm Home Discount scheme provides £140 discount on electricity bills, which include pre payment meters (PPM) if people meet the qualifying criteria and the Priority Services Register offers extra free services to:
- People of a pensionable age
 - Registered disabled
 - Have a hearing or visual impairment
 - Have long term ill-health
- 3.9 Further information revealed by Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in March of this year, identified that 13.5 million households across the UK had never switched, which meant there were £2.7 billion in savings to be made i.e. potential average saving of £312 per household per year

4. WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 At its next meeting, Members of the Working Group will receive information and packs in respect of possible energy efficiency champion training in order that appropriate advice can be given in their respective wards; in conjunction with this approach, it is also proposed that a Members Awareness Session be provided prior to a Council Meeting in the future.
- 4.2 The Service Director for Procurement will also provide the Working Group with information on the possibility of the Council becoming an energy supplier, which will outline the advantages and disadvantages.

- 4.3 Following its work, the Scrutiny Working Group will produce an evaluation report with clear recommendations to a future meeting of the Council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
as amended by the
LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS
COUNCIL
22ND APRIL, 2015
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
BACKGROUND PAPERS

NOTICE OF MOTION – COUNCIL 4TH MARCH, 2015 – INTERIM REPORT OF
SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP “FUEL POVERTY”

Freestanding Matter

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